



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

SEPTEMBER, 1919

## THE THREAT OF REVOLUTION

---

WESTWARD the course of revolution as well as of empire seems to take its way. It was only a few years ago that revolutionary movements were assumed to be confined to the Continent of Europe. Their existence and their activity there were not wondered at, because the Governments of countries there were, in the estimation of Americans, hopelessly despotic, and richly deserving of being swept into limbo. But there was not the slightest danger of any such processes occurring in Great Britain, with its liberal and democratic government, while the suggestion of their ever invading republican America was to be regarded with indignant contempt.

It was only a few weeks ago, however, that a very explicit and ominous threat of political revolution was made in Great Britain. That was when the so-called Triple Alliance, the labor unions comprising the mining, railroad, and general transportation workers, presented to the Government a series of demands, in default of the granting of which they contemplated a universal strike which would paralyze industry and starve the nation; the supremely significant thing being that the demands in question were not merely for amelioration of their conditions of employment, but also for the adoption of certain highly important governmental policies in foreign relations and in other directions having no connection whatever with domestic economics. Briefly stated, it was an attempt to coerce the Gov-

ernment in its general diplomatic and legislative activities, and was tantamount to forcible revolution.

That naturally attracted attention here, and some began unctuously to thank God that we were not as other men, even as our British cousins, subject to threats of revolution. But before such thanksgivings got above the temple roof, a rudely disturbing note broke in upon them. That was when the big unions of railroad employees in this country presented to the Government a series of demands identical in spirit and purport with those of the British Triple Alliance, and equally ominous of forcible revolution. Nominally, it is true, the demands were for either increased wages or decreased cost of living, with a most commendable expression of preference for the latter, on the perfectly logical ground that the former would be followed by further increase in cost of living, and the men would be no better off than before. But actually the gist of the matter lay in the demand that Congress provide for the immediate expropriation of all railroads by the Government.

At first blush, that astounding demand was received by the general public with a mixture of complacency, indifference, and acquiescence. Everybody realized that while the railroad men's wages had been greatly increased by the arbitrary act of the President only a short time ago, there had since been a still greater rise in the cost of living, so that the men were no better off than before, and perhaps not as well off. Therefore, if they were fairly entitled to the increased pay which the President gave them, as he assured us they were, they were equally entitled to another increase now, unless, preferably, the cost of living could be reduced.

Nor was the real significance of the demand for Government ownership at first fully appreciated. It was rather looked upon with indifference. The roads had been so abominably and disastrously bedevilled and manhandled for years that it did not seem to matter much what was done with them. The Government, losing forty millions a month on them, did not want to retain control, and had been threatening incontinently to dump the wrecks of them back upon their owners' hands. The owners, on the other hand, were reluctant to take them back, mindful of the way in which the Government through its Interstate Commerce Commission had for years striven diligently to starve them

to death, had then cursed them for being anaemic, and during a year of its control had scrambled them into chaos.

We do not believe in the policy of Government purchase of the railroads. We do not believe that the majority of American citizens believe in it or want it adopted. Nevertheless, it is a reputable governmental policy, which has been adopted in various other countries, and there can be no objection to its consideration here. If men want to discuss it, to advocate it, to agitate peaceably for it, to make it a party platform on which to appeal to the people, there is no occasion to say them nay.

Had these railroad workers' unions, therefore, been content with suggesting or requesting the adoption of that policy, their action would have been well within the bounds of propriety and of loyalty. They had as perfect a right to do that as any one else has to oppose such a policy. But they were not content with that. They *demand* Government ownership. They declared that they were "in no mood to brook" the return of the railroads to their lawful owners. And they declared in so many words that if Congress did not grant their demand, but instead adopted a plan proposed by the President and the Director-General of Railroads, they would go on universal strike and "tie the railways up so tight they will never run again." In other words, they threatened a universal strike against the Government of the United States.

That, we submit, grossly transcended the bounds of propriety and also of loyalty. It was an attempt to coerce the President and Congress. It was a threat to nullify the action of the Government, just as much as was that famous Nullification Act of years ago with which an earlier Democratic President knew how effectively to deal. There was no pretence that the adoption of the policy in question was desired by a majority of the American people. There was simply the statement that this very small minority of the people wanted it done, coupled with the threat that if it was not promptly done, the whole nation would be subjected to indescribable and inestimable loss, suffering, and disaster, with the almost certain accompaniment of violence, destruction of property, and bloodshed. There was no expression of willingness to discuss the matter, to consider other ways and means of attaining the economic relief to which the men were plausibly entitled. There was instead,

as we have already shown, a refusal to accept a proposal made by the President and Congress, authorities whom all other citizens, outside of those unions, regard with respect as always worthy of consideration.

Such a declaration of purpose, even if carried into effect, probably does not come under the Constitutional definition of treason, but it would be a glaring perversion of truth to pretend that it is compatible with genuine loyalty to the Government and to the Constitution of the United States, and he would be blind indeed who did not perceive in it by far the most ominous threat of revolution that this country has ever known. It is exactly at par with the threat to which we have referred as having been made in Great Britain only a week or two before. It is an attempt to make this not a popular but a class Government; not a Government of the people by the people for the people, but a Government of the people by a very limited class for the special benefit of that class.

It must have been a bitter reflection to the President, when his proposal of a plan of settlement was so defiantly and contemptuously flouted, that he had in a double sense brought the situation upon himself. There were not lacking those who foresaw and who foretold some such crisis as this at the time when he drove through Congress with whip and spur his measure for the arbitrary increase of railroad workers' wages regardless of other conditions. There were more who apprehended calamity when, at a supremely crucial time in our domestic affairs, he deserted his duties to the United States, placed himself confessedly out of touch with American affairs, and went abroad to pursue the delusive rainbow phantom of a "Presidency of the World."

Immediately following the establishment of the armistice, with the certainty of the reestablishment of peace, this country was confronted with the most weighty and the most urgent possible problems of readjustment. Never before had its domestic economy been so disturbed. Never before had there been such need of prompt and masterful administration to bring us back from the monstrous abnormalities of wartime to the normal conditions of peace. It was a task peculiarly pertinent to the President himself, since it was he who had taken the initiative in establishing the abnormal conditions of war. There was indeed no other

who could perform it. It was a task calculated to tax to the utmost his energies, if he devoted himself exclusively to it. It was a task which the welfare of the nation demanded above everything else, even above the technical signing of a peace with Germany. It was the more urgent because of our fatuous lack of preparation for it. Other nations, both our allies and our foes, realizing that peace with its mighty readjustments would inevitably follow the war, began preparing for peace almost as soon as they entered the war. But our President, having neglected preparation for war until we were literally plunging into it, similarly declined to make any preparation for peace until peace came. And then he washed his hands of the whole business and ran away for months, to let the nation which he was sworn to serve "stew in its own juice."

It can scarcely be doubted that this most ominous crisis in our national affairs could have been altogether avoided if the President had loyally attended to the business of his office, the business which the people of the United States elected him to transact, the business which his oath of office made it incumbent upon him to perform. He saw, or he professed to see, in December last, the magnitude and the vital importance of the railroad problem, and he urged Congress to deal with it. But he knew, as he did so, that Congress could not properly deal with it unless he himself were here, to give Congress information and coöperation. Knowing that, he deserted his post of duty. He went abroad for half a year, conscious of but indifferent to the fact that by so doing he was postponing the solution of this greatest and most pressing of our domestic problems, and was directly inviting some such crisis as that which has now come upon the nation.

There is proverbially nothing to be gained by crying over spilt milk. It will not solve the problem which is now before us merely to charge the President with recreancy. Nevertheless it would be unjust and mischievous to fail to fix the responsibility for the ominous and perilous crisis which has befallen the nation. We must realize that the President, by inexcusable neglect of duty, gave opportunity for just such trouble. That realization may well shatter what is left of faith in the wisdom of his leadership. Yet it must not cause us to forget that he is, after all, our Presi-

dent, and is likely to remain such for another year and a half, and that therefore in every right and proper measure which he may be moved at this belated moment to adopt for undoing the great evil which he himself has brought upon us, he must have the loyal and aggressive support of every American citizen.

### NO NEGATION OF NATIONALITY

NATIONALITY was the supreme issue of the war, and is the supreme issue of the ensuing peace. That must be the ultimate verdict of history.

It was not, of course, a new issue. The history of the world is largely a record of conflict between the principles of nationalism and internationalism. The great empires of old were essentially leagues of nations. They were even leagues for the maintenance of peace. The Peace of Rome came upon the world at the beginning of our era because the whole civilized world was subject to Rome; was comprised in the league of nations which had its capital and its council on the banks of the Tiber. So other empires, both before and after that of Rome, imposed peace for a time upon nations which otherwise would have been in frequent conflict.

Yet they all failed of endurance. Their common lot was to suffer disintegration, disruption, dissolution into their component elements. That was not because of any lack of statesmanship, or of benevolent purpose. Empire after empire practised equity among its constituent states. Rome took some of her greatest emperors from distant provinces. Roman citizenship was as sacred at Jerusalem, and an appeal to Caesar was as potent at Caesarea as in Rome itself. The end came because combination was not and could not be made amalgamation. The various nations of these leagues were held together by artificial bonds, and these were often bonds of peace and of mutual interest. But despite that fact they remained separate peoples. There was a certain principle of nationality which was unconquerable and indestructible, which neither the profits and pleasures of peace could lull into unconsciousness, nor the rigors of war could annihilate, and which in time asserted itself above all the power of international imperialism.

Now and then, it is true, a great empire has arisen which